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SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRAQ: PUK "PM" BARHAM SALIH IN TURKEY -
SUGGESTS BETTER IF TURKS DON'T SEND TROOPS, OPTIMISTIC
ABOUT FUTURE OF IRAQ, SEES HIS FUTURE IN IRAQI NATIONAL
POLITICS

(U) Classified by DCM Robert Deutsch. Reasons 1.5 b and d.

Summary

1. (C) Patriotic Union of Kurdistan "Prime Minister" Barham Salih visited Ankara October 6-7 for talks with Turkish officials. He met DCM, PolMilCouns and PolMilOff Oct. 6 and said that while he expected terrorism in Iraq to get worse before it got better, he was optimistic about the future, and that improvements in Iraq in general had exceeded his expectations. None of the "doom and gloom" predictions had come true. Salih, whose visit received considerable press coverage, told us that while he believed Iraqi Kurds should not object to a Turkish troop deployment to Iraq if it meant fewer US casualties, he worried that the introduction of Turkish troops would complicate the coalition's task, and that it would be better to have Iraqis do the job. (Press headlines read "PUK Doesn't Want Turkish Troops in Iraq.") Salih told us and the Turks that the PUK wanted PKK/KADEK out of northern Iraq, and confided to us that this would require close PUK/Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) cooperation, and that the PUK and its leader Jalal Talabani would be prepared to help. He also said that we should not use the military option against the PKK/KADEK for the time being. He said he believed that Secretary Powell's six-month timeframe for completion of an Iraqi constitution was achievable, and that the problems would not be with treatment of religion or federalism, but rather with how to re-draw administrative boundaries, and that this could be left until after ratification. Salih's term as PUK "PM" will end in January 2004. He told us he will not seek re-election, but rather, intends to get involved in national politics in Baghdad. End Summary.

Salih Optimistic Long-Term, But Expects Terrorism

2. (C) On Oct. 6, DCM, PolMilCouns and PolMilOff met with visiting PUK "PM" Barham Salih, who was in Ankara for talks with Turkish officials en route back to Iraq from Washington. Salih said that he was optimistic about the future of Iraq and that the situation there was already better than he had expected before the war. None of the "doom and gloom" predictions had come true. However, terrorism was polluting the atmosphere. The "bad guys" smell blood, he cautioned, and said he expected problems with terrorism to get worse before they got better.

Salih on Turkish Troops for Iraq

3. (C) DCM noted that the USG thought that in the right conditions the introduction of Turkish troops would contribute to security and stability in Iraq. Salih replied that he had told Masoud Barzani that if the introduction of Turkish troops would reduce the casualties and risk to US forces, the Iraqi Kurds should not say no, after what the US had done. He then said that it was doing harm to speak to the issue as Iraqi Kurds, and that the matter of foreign troops should be an Iraqi issue at the national/Governing Council level. Seeming to move away from his original statement, Salih added that putting in Turkish troops would complicate the coalition's task, and that it would be better to have Iraqis do the job. The Turks, he continued, do not speak the language and unlike the US forces, whom Salih called extremely impressive, do not appeal to people's humanity. "You may end up with a problem from this. Be careful," he said. Salih said he had told MFA Undersecretary Ziyal that Turkish troops would be deliberately attacked by

former regime loyalists, that Turkish press headlines would accuse the KDP, PUK or PKK/KADEK of the attacks, and that the Turkish forces would not exercise the control and composure of US forces in the situation. All of this, Salih opined, would amount to political and security liabilities for Turkey, Iraq and the coalition. (Press play mirrored these points: Turkish Daily News quoted Salih: "Deployment of Turkish soldiers or those from other neighboring countries could harm the security and political environment. This could be against the interests of the Iraqi people and at the same time those of Turkey.") The DCM noted that the Turks had been told that the Sunni Arabs would welcome Turkish troops. Salih disagreed and said Iraqi Arabs were telling the Turks what they thought Turkey wanted to hear.

14. (C) Salih said that at the end of the day, Iraq needed Turkey as a partner and a model, even with all of its shortcomings, but that a Turkish troop deployment would muddy the waters in this regard, and would push Iraqi nationalists toward confrontation with the Turks.

PUK Will Cooperate Against PKK/KADEK

15. (C) The DCM noted that the US was committed to eliminate the PKK/KADEK threat in Iraq and that we believed the Turkish Reintegration Law was an opportunity for most of the PKK/KADEK elements in Iraq to return and reestablish themselves in Turkey. Anything the PUK could do to help them understand that they will not be allowed to remain in Iraq would be appreciated. Salih answered that he was surprised by the grip the PKK/KADEK leadership had over the rank and file, and that getting any significant numbers of them to return to Turkey would require close PUK-KDP cooperation. He urged the US to avoid any military engagement with the PKK/KADEK at this time, as it could unbalance the stability in the north. Salih added that if the US could convince the PKK/KADEK rank and file that a good reception with international monitoring by an NGO, the UN or the US awaited them if they surrendered, there would be better odds of getting them back to Turkey. "We don't want them in Iraq either," he said. "Their leaders are bad guys, and their followers are blind to reality. I don't trust them. They are opportunistic liars. If you can get rid of them, it will be better for us." Salih suggested using the VOA Kurdish service to broadcast messages about the opportunities available under the Turkish Reintegration Law. Talabani and the PUK would cooperate with the US in its effort against the PKK/KADEK, he promised. He thought Barzani would help as well, especially if it meant an end to the Turkish troop presence in northern Iraq, but said Barzani and the KDP would have to understand that it was not/not useful or helpful to use the PKK/KADEK presence to pressure Turkey. Salih said there were people in Europe the PUK could talk to for help against the PKK/KADEK and that Turkey should try to get Ocalan to help as well. First, he said, there needs to be more comfort about the Reintegration Law. "Don't use too much pressure too early," he counseled, or Kurds generally will believe that Turkey is pushing the US into a confrontation to create a schism between the US and the Kurds.

Turkish Concerns - Iraqi Constitution and Ethnicity

16. (C) Salih told us that in his meeting with MFA U/S Ziyal earlier in the day, Ziyal was focused on issues of the Iraqi constitution, federalism and ethnicity. Salih said he told Ziyal that the Autonomy Law from the 1970s provided for autonomy for the Kurdistan region (not for specific ethnic groups in the region), and would be a basis for discussion in the constitutional process. He also said that the Iraqi Kurds would accept a modality to resolve the status of Kirkuk. Salih asked the Turks to encourage the new Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF) leadership to work with the PUK. The Turks told Salih that Syria and Iran had asked Turkey for a tripartite meeting about the situation in northern Iraq, about which both Damascus and Tehran were agitated, but the Turks refused. Salih told us that he would see TGS reps the morning of Oct. 7, but that on future visits he would not see Turkish intelligence (TNIO) or military reps, as the nature of the relationship had changed and those entities should see their Iraqi counterparts, while he should confine himself to political and foreign policy contacts.

Salih on Constitution Timeline, Personal Future

17. (C) Salih told us he believed the Iraqi constitution could be completed within the six-month timeframe suggested by Secretary Powell. He was confident the Iraqis could agree on

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language concerning the role of religion and the nature of federalism. The contentious piece would be the determination of administrative boundaries, which he said could be deferred and considered by a "blue ribbon" commission after completion of the constitution. In any case, he noted, constitutions have never been very important in the Middle East. Salih noted that, unlike the KDP, the PUK had decided to fly the Iraqi flag side-by-side with the Kurdish flag. This was a particularly hard decision to adhere to when Secretary Powell visited Halabja, he added, noting that the symbolism of flying the Iraqi flag over the Halabja cemetery was painful. The people of northern Iraq, he said, feel increasingly connected to Baghdad, and that he would like more support from Baghdad for the administration of Sulaymaniyah. Salih told us that PUK leader Talabani would visit Ankara on November 19, while serving as IGC Chairman, at the invitation of the GOT. Turning to his own political future, he said that his term as PUK "PM" would end in January and that he would not seek reelection. He hopes to find a role for himself in national politics in Baghdad in 2004.

18. (U) Baghdad Minimize Considered.

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